SUSAN DELANO McKELVEY, 1883–1964

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IN JUNE OF 1964, we received from Mrs. Susan Delano McKelvey a letter requesting her retirement from the Board of Overseers' Committee to Visit the Arnold Arboretum and from her appointment as Research Associate. Mrs. McKelvey stated she could no longer do the things she used to do and wished to make way for someone more active in both of the roles she cherished. Her wish was a difficult one to approve and so these notes were originally prepared in appreciation for service at a friend's retirement. We did not know that time was to be so short, for Mrs. McKelvey died on July the eleventh.

Susan Adams Delano McKelvey was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 13, 1883. She was graduated from Bryn Mawr, married Charles W. McKelvey in 1907, and made her home for a number of years at Oyster Bay, Long Island. About 1920, she moved to Boston. Determined to study landscape gardening, she consulted Professor Charles Sprague Sargent at the Arnold Arboretum, volunteering her services in return for instruction in the identification of plant materials. Professor Sargent believed in testing volunteers, often with menial tasks such as pulling weeds or, in the case of Mrs. McKelvey, washing clay pots in the greenhouses. Under the guidance of William H. Judd, who was in charge of the greenhouses, Mrs. McKelvey also assisted in plant propagation; but she carefully reserved some time for reading, which led to research in the library. The famous lilac collection of the Arnold Arboretum was being developed, and, at Sargent's suggestion, she undertook the task of compiling information on these plants. The manuscript she submitted was of such value that E. H. Wilson added a brief history of the lilac and Alfred Rehder a key and a generic description. The horticultural information, the descriptions, and the documentation, however, were the patient effort of Mrs. McKelvey. The manuscript was published in 1928 as *The Lilac: A Monograph.* It was dedicated simply to "The Professor." This book, though long out of print, is still the only monograph of a favorite among flowering shrubs.

In the following years Mrs. McKelvey spent some time in the southwestern United States and became interested in the Yuccas and their relatives, often the most conspicuous plants of the drier areas. She sought help from various people in the identification of this difficult group and in the process learned at first hand how little information was available. At the suggestion of Dr. Alice Eastwood, of the California Academy of Sciences, she began a diligent study of these difficult plants, photographing and collecting specimens for the herbarium and for cytological

work. With Karl Sax, then a young cytologist, later to become director of the Arboretum, she published a paper basic to the understanding of the genus *Yucca* and its frequent associate *Agave*. In the study of the explorations that led to the discovery of the earlier published species of *Yucca*, Mrs. McKelvey became an authority on the routes of the early travellers and the explorers of the great Southwest, thereby unconsciously laying the foundation for still further research. The first part of her work on *Yucca* was published by the Arboretum in 1938. Its acceptance as a scientific study of high quality was soon evident, but the years of World War II delayed the issuance of part two until 1947.

The last of the three books written by Mrs. McKelvey was probably the most demanding of her abilities to extract historical, particularly botanical, data from general travel accounts. In 1955, the Arnold Arboretum published *The Botanical Exploration of the Trans-Mississippi West*, 1790–1850, by Susan Delano McKelvey. Although a volume of over eleven hundred pages, each seemingly with one or more footnotes of documentation, the book is an eminently readable account both of history and of geographical exploration from the botanical point of view. The reviews of this book which appeared in history journals, as well as in botanical ones, attest the value of the work with its interweaving of data from so many sources.

For her achievements Mrs. McKelvey was acknowledged and honored by horticultural societies and organizations. In 1929, she received the Centennial Gold Medal from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and the Schaeffer Medal from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. In 1957, the New York Botanical Garden honored her with the Sarah Gildersleeve Fife award given to individuals for work in the field of botanical literature.

Mrs. McKelvey received her first appointment as a research assistant to the staff of the Arnold Arboretum in 1931, when Professor Oakes Ames was supervisor. It was the privilege of the succeeding directors to continue her appointment as a member of the research staff.

In 1928, Mrs. McKelvey accepted from the Board of Overseers of Harvard University an appointment to the Committee to Visit the Arnold Arboretum. Rarely did she miss a meeting or an opportunity to lend support and to express her interest in the work or the collections. She valued the living collections as plants to be enjoyed, as well as to be studied. She knew the value of herbarium specimens, and the difficulty of preparing them, and was appreciative of good herbarium management. Further, she realized the contributory value of cytological and anatomical work in her own monographic studies. Thus she fulfilled her duties on the Visiting Committee, interested and knowledgeable in the many aspects of a modern arboretum.

The association of Susan McKelvey with the Arnold Arboretum was a generous one. From her early efforts as a volunteer in the greenhouse to her bequest of research materials, her contributions were many. With her brother she devoted her energies toward raising a memorial fund to

Professor Sargent which remains a significant part of the endowment of the Arnold Arboretum. Through the years, her many gifts of letters and records, of specimens and photographs, of books and equipment, have all enriched our organization.

We regret the passing of a valued friend and supporter.

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